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TAGS: [PREF PHUM SMIG TH LA](#)

SUBJECT: LAO HMONG: DCM STRESSES USG POSITION ON HMONG,
THAI CLAIM LAO WILLINGNESS TO COORDINATE CLOSELY

REF: A. BANGKOK 3044
[B. STATE 122622](#)
[C. VIENTIANE 553](#)

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle, reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The DCM, in a December 4 meeting with Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters (RTARF) Director of Border Affairs Lieutenant General Nipat Thonglek, emphasized USG concern regarding plans to accelerate the return to Laos of the Hmong at Phetchabun and Nong Khai. In particular, the DCM stressed that the USG would react negatively to a forced return of the Nong Khai population which has UNHCR "of concern" status and the portion of the Phetchabun population that the RTG itself had screened-in. Nipat said that, in coordinating for the return with his Lao counterpart, he was following a clear directive from the Thai government to return the Hmong to Laos. Nipat said that the RTG had come to the point where it felt compelled to move ahead with the Lao government on the issue of the Hmong. Nipat had met December 2 with his Lao counterpart, Brigadier General Bouasieng Chamaphanh, Deputy Chief of Staff Department at the Ministry of Defense, and agreed on a terms of reference for the return of the Hmong. Nipat described what he considered "good cooperation" on the part of the Lao in agreeing to measures that would insure humanitarian treatment of the Hmong, differentiating between the Nong Khai 158, which would be in Vientiane for processing prior to third-country resettlement, the Phetchabun "screened in," who would be returned to a special location and also available for monitoring and possible resettlement, and the bulk of the Phetchabun group being returned as illegal economic migrants. The date for the return had not yet been set, Nipat told the DCM, but he implied it may be as much as a month away. Both Nipat and, separately DPM Suthep with Ambassador, promised to provide the U.S. with a list of individuals at the Phetchabun camp which the Thai "screened-in."

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Nipat made clear that the all Hmong, at Phetchabun and Nong Khai, will be included in the upcoming return operation and we made clear that forcible return of the screened-in Phetchabun group and the UNHCR-recognized group at the Nong Khai IDC will have an effect on the bilateral relationship. We will continue to push our military contacts for the long-awaited Phetchabun screened-in list and for greater clarity on when returns might begin. Parsing Nipat's comments, it appears we have at least several weeks and perhaps into the new year before the operation begins but there are no guarantees. Nipat was clearly interested to hear of our recent discussions with the GOL on

the Nong Khai population (Ref C) but was not willing to repeat earlier RTG promises that the Nong Khai population would only be moved after Phetchabun was empty. End Summary and comment.

NONG KHAI HMONG TO GO TO VIENTIANE BEFORE RESETTLEMENT

13. (C) LTG Nipat said he had come to an agreement with General Bouasieng that the 158 Hmong being held in the Nong Khai Immigration Detention Center (IDC) would be returned to Laos, transferred to Vientiane, and ready for resettlement to third countries within thirty days of return to Laos. Nipat said that General Bouasieng had stated that the Lao government would provide a specific facility for the Nong Khai Hmong to stay in while in Vientiane, and that it would grant the U.S. and other parties access to this group during the period of processing for resettlement.

14. (C) Nipat suggested that it would be helpful if the UNHCR or the USG communicated plans for resettlement from Laos directly to the Hmong at Nong Khai. This would go far in facilitating the safe return of this group to Laos prior to resettlement, Nipat said. The DCM told Nipat that many concerns would need to be resolved by the Thai and the Lao before the USG could consider such a request. Nipat told the DCM that the RTG was committed to providing the U.S. with complete information regarding plans for the return. The DCM told Nipat that the USG had recently initiated a conversation with the GOL regarding a plan to resettle the Nong Khai population from Laos to third countries and expressed the

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hope that a hasty return of that population to Laos would not derail that so far encouraging dialogue.

PHETCHABUN HMONG TO BE SEPARATED INTO TWO GROUPS

15. (C) Nipat said that all of the 4,369 Hmong at Phetchabun would be returned to Laos. That said, Nipat claimed that the Lao government had agreed that those on the RTG "screened-in" list -- numbering approximately 575 -- would be sent to a particular area in Laos, but that the location had not yet been determined. According to Nipat, Lao BG Bouasieng agreed that the Phetchabun "screened-in" group would be available to other nations for resettlement and to monitoring by third-country diplomats while awaiting resettlement. Nipat said that Bouasieng could be trusted, as he was the decision maker on the Hmong issue for the Lao government. The DCM underscored to Nipat that the RTG decision to return "screened-in" Hmong to Laos was problematic for the USG. Nipat said he knew that the U.S. could not support the decision to return the Hmong but asked for "understanding" by the U.S.

TIMING OF RETURNS NOT YET DETERMINED BY THAI AND LAO

16. (C) The DCM asked Nipat whether the two sides had agreed on a timeline for the return. Nipat said the return would be conducted in a "proper timeframe" but that there was no agreement on a specific date. Nipat did give assurances that no returns would be conducted in the next few weeks and noted that he would have several more "logistical" meetings with his GOL counterpart before the operation could begin. Nipat said that the return of the Hmong from both Phetchabun and Nong Khai would be conducted in one operation with no pause or break. The Lao government had requested that all returns be conducted in this way due to the level of assets, transportation and otherwise, needed for the operation. The DCM told LTG Nipat close consultation would be needed to insure the protection of the Hmong and asked whether the Thai had discussed the matter with UNHCR. Nipat said no discussions had been held, but expressed hope that UNHCR could assist.

17. (C) Nipat explained that staff from his RTARF Border Affairs Division would be stationed in Laos when the return of the Hmong was carried out in order to facilitate "humanitarian treatment" of the Hmong once they were moved across the Thai-Lao border at Nong Khai. Local Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) staff (likely Thai Army personnel) would be in charge of moving the Hmong to immigration at Nong Khai.

RTG TO CLARIFY "SCREENED-IN" LIST AND TO PROVIDE TO USG

18. (C) The DCM reiterated to Nipat the importance of the long-standing USG request for the list names of the "screened-in" Phetchabun population. LTG Nipat stated that Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva had made clear the importance of insuring protection for those on the list. As such, Nipat's staff would next week work with representatives of the Thai NSC and the task force administering the Huay Nam Khao camp to check the names on the list. The RTG would provide the list to the USG after "cleaning up the list." Nipat claimed the list was problematic, as the staff at the camp believed that the Hmong had on the whole provided inaccurate information to Thai officials. For example, the entire population of Hmong had used only "six or seven" last names in identifying themselves to the camp staff.

19. (C) Separately, on December 4, the Ambassador raised the USG request for the list of the "screened-in" Hmong at Phetchabun with Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thuagsuban. Suthep said he had recently discussed the list with Thai Army Commander General Anupong Paochinda and assured the Ambassador that the RTG would soon provide it to the U.S.
JOHN